

AIDING THE HANDICAPPED THROUGH  
SERVICES TO BLIND

E. F. Costigan

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## Aiding The Handicapped Through Services To Blind

By E. F. Costigan, *Director*  
*Adult Blind Services*

THE Division of Adult Blind has been developed out of recognition of the fact that blindness in adults as well as in children is a problem requiring and meriting special services under a general welfare program. Blind children have received special consideration almost since the founding of the state. Adults, however, were included in the program only after a long period of promotion, although it is known that approximately 60 per cent of



the 3600 blind persons in the state became blind after the age of 21.

First recognition of the state's responsibility to aid the adult blind was indicated by the 1903 legislature in its authorization of an appropriation for the establishment of a Wisconsin Workshop for the Blind, to be located in Milwaukee under the supervision of the State Board of Control. On this nucleus the present comprehensive program has been constructed. From its early beginning as a training shop in which basket-making was the only trade taught, the Workshop has grown in stature and objective. Contrary to general belief, the Workshop provides no residential facilities for its employees.

Prior to the beginning of the present world conflict as many as 95 blind workers were employed at making cocoa mats, rubber mats, baskets and brushes. A supplementary program provided for the manufacture of brooms, rugs and other household articles in the home communities of blind workers. Production of saleable articles, however, was not the sole objective of the Workshop. At its looms and benches blind persons long accustomed to idleness and boredom became accustomed to the routine of regular employment, acquired new work habits and attitudes essential to placement in private industry.

The success of this educational program is attested to by the fact that at present the Workshop employs one-third as many men as in 1940 and by the further fact that these men who have left subsidized

employment have found positions in private industry.

The Workshop continues its function as a training center for blind men and women. A few employes continue at their trades by choice, preferring a work in which they are skilled and by which they are assured relative security. A smaller group of workers, who because of other physical or personality handicaps must be considered unemployable in private industry, will always require the security of sheltered employment. Training is provided in skills, work habits and attitudes which might be obtained in no other way. Finally, an opportunity is offered for both the blind person and the placement agent to discover and evaluate capacities and capabilities.

Products of the Wisconsin Workshop for the Blind and its supplementary home industries continue to be in demand by the housewives of the state, although quantities are sharply reduced by shortages of material and labor. Markets are being maintained which on the return of normal commercial conditions can again be exploited and expanded.

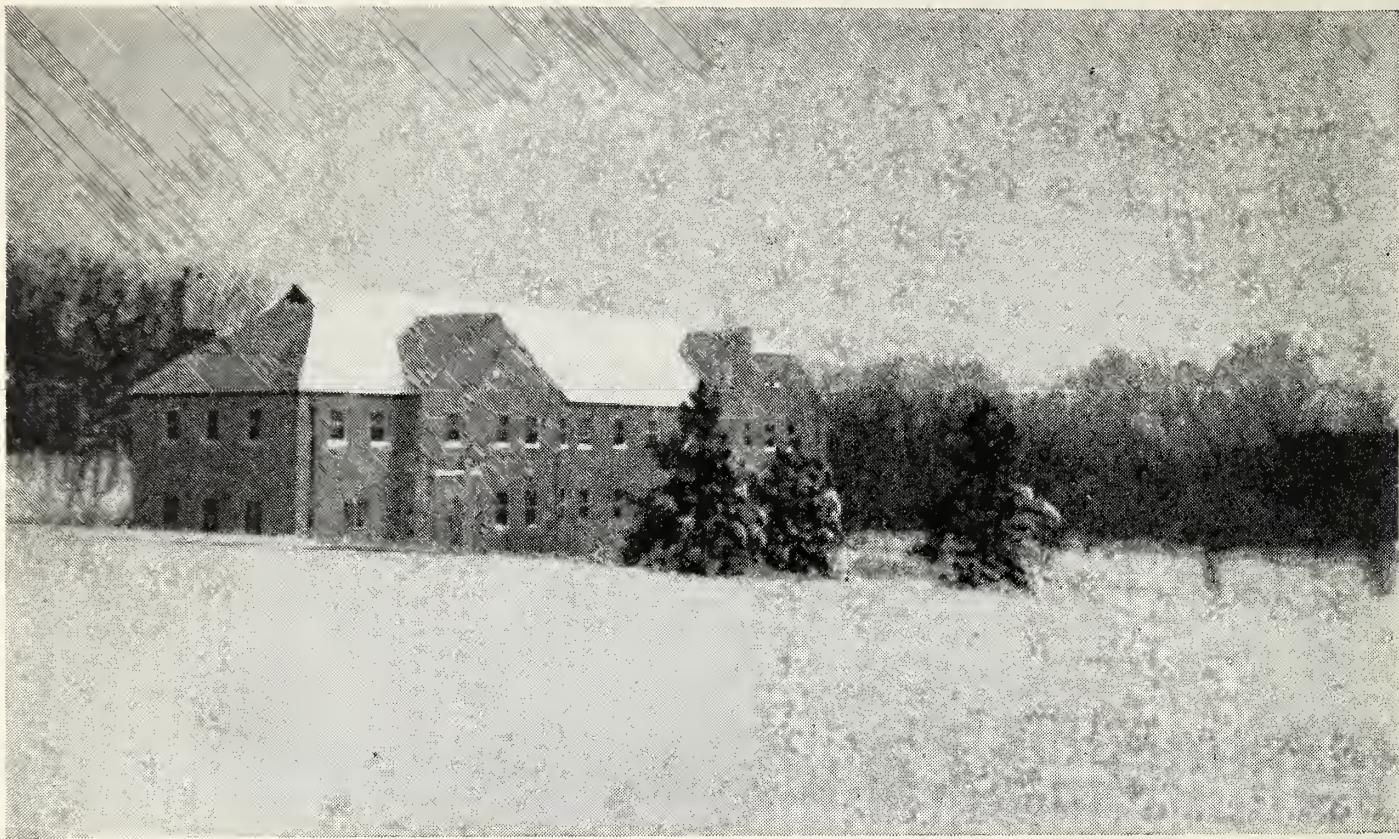
### Summer School for Blind

In addition to the program of the Workshop, a summer school for the adult blind is provided under the administration of the Department of Public Instruction with the close co-operation of the Division of Adult Blind. First opened in 1918 for men, women were admitted in 1922. With an enrollment of between 70 and 80 each year, the summer school has given training for some 700 persons since its inception.

A complete service is furnished free of cost to the student. Instructions are given in basket-making, broom-making, rug-weaving, chair caning, leather work, manual training, piano tuning, typing and Dictaphone work, Braille and home economics. Handicraft and trade classes also offer opportunity for assisting in adjustments to the new environment created by blindness.

The student is encouraged and guided toward a more efficient utilization of his remaining senses, is taught special skills which in some measure reduce his dependence upon others and is aided in making





*Winter Scene at Oregon School*

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## State Rules Are Effective Against 'Baby Farms'

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THE "baby farm" business is out in Wisconsin, and the state intends to keep it out.

This is the comment of officials of the State Department of Public Welfare on reports from other states that war conditions have brought a marked upturn in the "sale" of infants by unregulated private agencies.

The situation in some areas of the Middle West has become a matter of grave concern both to private and official agents but Wisconsin has experienced no difficulty under present regulations.

Prior to enactment of the state children's code law there had been many individuals and private agencies in Wisconsin which acted virtually as "brokers" in the handling of unwanted children. These places received unmarried mothers and later disposed of their children, some of them carefully and with judgment but most of them merely as a "business proposition." Usually neither the child's antecedents nor the conditions of the home in which it was placed received much consideration.

The children's code set up definite controls for these activities. Any home receiving children, except from relatives, must have a permit and any "agency" placing children in other homes must be licensed. These restrictions are intended to assure that foster homes meet reasonable standards for the welfare of the children placed in them and assure that only sound children are placed with responsible families.

The permit and licensing provisions give the state effective means for the protection of both the children and the prospective foster parents.

Since the enactment of the children's code the "baby farm" business has been virtually eliminated in Wisconsin, although it still flourishes in other states. A recent Milwaukee case is one of comparatively few in which the law has had to be invoked. The heavy penalty imposed in that instance, according to public welfare officials, was indication that the state intends to have no "baby farm" scandals in connection with the placement and care of its infant wards.



those adaptations necessary for near-normal existence in a strange, newly distorted world. Without reducing the scope or efficiency of the handicraft or trade programs, the summer school has increased its emphasis upon the social adjustment phases of the work during the last several years. Reports of progress are made to the Division and these reports are incorporated into the case histories of the students. They prove invaluable in later guidance and placement services.

Other guidance and teaching services are provided in the homes of blind adults of the state. The Field Agency for the Adult Blind, organized in 1923, became a part of the Division of Adult Blind in the State Department of Public Welfare in 1939. The program is being continued and expanded.

An annual census of the blind in Wisconsin is provided for with a register of all blind persons in the state. Through its field staff contacts are maintained with public and private welfare agencies, clinics,

hospitals, physicians and interested citizens for the purpose of discovering and recording all cases of blindness, together with statistical information concerning each case.

The field staff also provides home teaching service, supplementing work of the summer school and Workshop for the Blind. For the homebound, and as a means of continuing instructions begun at the summer school, this teaching service offers training in handicrafts and guidance in social adjustment. Further, the home teaching service offers an opportunity for analysis of capacities valuable in determining feasibility of rehabilitation services.

As an aid toward adjustment and as a means of recreation and instruction the "talking book machine" provided by the federal government and distributed through this division, has proved to be of great value. Some 614 machines are now in operation in the state and others are being placed in the hands of blind readers daily. These machines, by which books are read from records, serve also to provide necessary and corollary reading for blind students at colleges and universities.

### **Employment of Blind**

Employment of the blind is no longer restricted to those few traditional trades which once provided a precarious living to the ambitious. Instead, private industry has provided and continues to provide opportunities for full-time employment of blind and partially sighted persons at operations once considered available only to the sighted. Automatic lathes, punch presses and drill presses are being operated in competition with sighted workers to the complete credit of the blind and to the full satisfaction of employers. A full-time placement agent is employed by the division. Through his efforts 100 placements have been made in various industrial plants in the state. Some plants have hired one or two blind persons; three plants now have 10, 12 and 13 blind employees respectively.

Many blind persons have obtained positions in private industry through their own efforts. Further supplementing the number of employed blind persons is a group engaged in professions and occupations other than industry. This group includes those operating candy vending routes, piano tuners, broom-makers, rug weavers, Dictaphone operators, osteopaths, masseurs, teachers and lawyers.

Operators of vending stands in public



*Blind Sales Stand*



buildings compose another self-employed group. Ten stands are now operated in Wisconsin under provisions of the Randolph-Sheppard act of 1936. Other stands are in prospect. Since 1939 the operation of these vending stands has been supervised by the Division of Adult Blind.

The passage of Public Law 113 (Barden-LaFollette Rehabilitation act of 1943) has made possible materially increased assistance toward improvement of conditions for the blind throughout the nation. Fortunately, Wisconsin's existing laws were adequate for immediate participation. This state was one of the first to submit a plan for participation in federal funds made available under the Act for the use of states in carrying out its provisions.

The federal portion of the national program is administered by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Federal Security Agency. The federal office participates in the state's program in three categories: (1) administration, (2) vocational guidance and placement, (3) rehabilitation case service. Rehabilitation case service is carried on with the state on a 50-50 matching basis. It renders almost unlimited assistance in those cases for whom eligibility and feasibility can be established. The objective in each case is vocational rehabilitation. Available services include assistance for higher education (through four years of college or university training); vocational guidance and training; placement with follow-up service; physical restoration (medical or surgical, including hospitalization and after care). Allowances are made for maintenance and transportation in cases in which need can be established.

An examination of all cases in the register is being conducted with a view to eligibility for and feasibility of rehabilitation aid. New cases are being analyzed and investigated as they are discovered.

Services made possible under the rehabilitation act enable the division to offer a complete and well-rounded program of assistance to the adult blind. With aid, many of those blind persons formerly barred from attaining economic independence can be established as self-sustaining, participating members of society. Others once relegated to relative isolation are helped to re-establish social attitudes and contacts valuable to themselves and their communities. Still others, through the social program, are enabled

to provide for their own amusement or recreation, despite confining limitations other than blindness, reducing materially the burden of care upon their families.

It has taken many years to develop the existing program for the adult blind of Wisconsin. Undoubtedly, many more years will be required to accomplish even relatively complete social adjustment for a majority of the blind population. The speed with which the handicap imposed by blindness is overcome is dependent upon the understanding of and co-operation with all phases of the program by each agency and individual citizen of the state.

The Division of Adult Blind is a public welfare agency functioning in the interest of the people of the state. Each placement of a blind worker in private industry is a potential or actual social or economic liability removed from the public assistance rolls. Each blind person assisted in making an adjustment toward normal or near-normal participation in his community, city, or state affairs is another social asset realized from a social liability.

Social and economic segregation of the blind is undesirable in its every aspect. The program of this division is aimed at assisting in the restoration of the desire and ability of blind citizens to resume positions as participating and contributing members of their communities and state. Placements are made on a regular competitive basis; performance is the only criterion of success. Socially successful adjustment is measured in terms of ability; participation and contribution to the limit of ability should be the final achievement.

It is the division's hope that an all-out program of prevention of blindness may soon be inaugurated. Despite its well-organized and complete program of assistance to the adult blind, it is felt that past efforts have been directed at effects rather than causes. To correct this condition, unnecessary blindness must be prevented through the co-ordinated efforts of all state agencies. Commendable work is now being carried on by several state departments, but it is the belief of this division that it should lead in co-ordinating and directing efforts toward an adequate prevention program.

Prevention of blindness offers no immediate dividends, but efforts started now will prove valuable investments in the future.



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